

Eating Out Tips That Won't Tip the Scale

Do you eat out once per week or every day and worry about your weight tipping the scale? One of the keys to healthy dining out is to find a balance between an occasional indulgence and excessive eating so that you won't tip the weight scale. Toby Smithson, a registered dietitian with the Lake County Health Department/Community Health Center and spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association, tells us that eating out isn't reserved for special occasions anymore, so it is important to pay attention to what you are choosing and how you will balance out your intake with physical activity.

Smithson offers the following five tips and tricks to avoid weight gain when you eat out whether it is at a restaurant or at a holiday gathering:

- 1) **Check it out:** Go online to search for the restaurant menus and possibly the nutrition analysis. Fast food facts can be found online as well. This all helps with planning ahead on making healthy choices. A great web site to find healthy options at restaurants across the United States is: healthydiningfinder.com.
- 2) **Voice your choice:** Remember you are the (paying) customer and the restaurant wants to please you. Don't be afraid to ask about menu items or substitutions. You also may tell the wait staff what modifications you would like to request. The same holds true when you are dining at the home of friends or family-- voice your choice. Questions you may want to ask your wait staff are:
 - Can salad dressings or sauces be on the side?
 - Can I split an entrée with someone in my party?
 - Can I receive a lunch portion at the dinner meal? (Lunch portions are 1/2 to 3/4 of the dinner portion.)Also, ask about the portion size of your side dishes or entrée. Be assertive with your requests. You are the paying customer.
- 3) **Spend wisely:** Spend your calories wisely. Eat your favorites and skip the foods that are just there. For example, if you don't care that much for breads in the bread basket, skip eating the bread or if an appetizer is ordered for the whole table to share and you don't care for the item, skip it.

- 4) **Wrap it up:** A typical restaurant meal contains between 1000-2000 calories, so take a doggy bag home. Some customers ask the wait staff to portion out the meal (divide it in half or in thirds) and place the extra portion in a doggy bag before bringing it to the table. Or, you can ask for a doggy bag at the end of your meal. This recommendation holds true if you are eating a holiday meal at the home of friends or family. Remember that you should feel comfortable but not stuffed at the end of your meal.
- 5) **Enjoy the scenery:** If you are on vacation, you will have several opportunities to increase your physical activity by taking a walk to window shop or going for a swim. During the holidays, make it a family tradition to get some exercise after the meal.